

THE SMITHSONIAN ON THE FLICKR COMMONS

Background

In June 2008, the Smithsonian Institution was the 4th institution to launch on [The Commons](http://www.flickr.com/commons) (<http://www.flickr.com/commons>). The Commons is a special area of the popular photo sharing site, Flickr, featuring photographic collections from national and international libraries, museums and archivesⁱ. The Commons states two goals:

"The key goals of The Commons on Flickr are to firstly show you hidden treasures in the world's public photography archives, and secondly to show how your input and knowledge can help make these collections even richer."

To date (August 2010), the Smithsonian has published over 2000 images with the designation "no known copyright restrictions"ⁱⁱ from 13 different unitsⁱⁱⁱ. The project is a pan-Smithsonian initiative with staff from the Smithsonian Institution Archives and Office of the Chief Information Officer coordinating and completing uploads and communication on the Commons.

Goals

Public knowledge. Increase public knowledge of and access to the Smithsonian's digital collections, programs, expertise, and other resources through the use of Smithsonian photographic collections to draw new visitors to the Smithsonian, those who might not otherwise come to our museums, libraries, and archives in pursuit of their interests.

Develop a Smithsonian online community. Continue to create community by reaching out to new and existing audiences. A key goal will be to explore the interests of "digital natives" who use social networking sites in ways we have yet to understand.

Improve public outreach. Through learning more about our audiences, through social tagging, public comments, and the resulting social dialog, increase current methods of outreach as well as develop new ones. Gather information about the interests of the Smithsonian's audiences and enhance the documentation and interpretation of our collections using the knowledge, perspectives, and experiences of these audiences.

Results

The images in the Smithsonian's "photostream" have received over 3.5 million views, tens of thousands of tags, and positive press coverage. Participation in the Commons has significantly increased the use of the photos by the public. A good example of increased exposure to the images comes from the Smithsonian Libraries' "[Portraits of Scientists" set on Flickr](#). These photographs of 19th and early 20th century scientists and inventors have been available on the Smithsonian Libraries' website since 2003. Though a popular and cited web resource, in the three months that the photographs had been on Flickr, they have received nearly as many visits as during the previous five years on the Smithsonian site.

SI staff working on the Commons field questions and comments posted to the photos. Flickr users frequently inform us of their intentions to use the images in personal and educational projects to ensure compliance with Smithsonian policies. Finally, an unexpected result of the project was a donation of photos about the famous "Scopes Monkey Trial" to the Smithsonian Institution Archives from a donor who appreciated the Smithsonian's efforts in open and transparent sharing of its collections. [Read more about the results](http://si-pddr.si.edu/dspace/handle/10088/8156) (<http://si-pddr.si.edu/dspace/handle/10088/8156>) in a paper published by the Archival Science Journal.

Smithsonian Collection Tag Cloud



Your photostream

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Smithsonian Photostream



ⁱ Brooklyn Museum, Library of Congress, Bibliothèque de Toulouse, Biblioteca de Arte-Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, National Maritime Museum, The Library of Virginia, Nationaal Archief, Imperial War Museum Collections, New York Public Library, State Library of Queensland, Australia, Oregon State University Archives, Swedish National Heritage Board, The Field Museum Library, Getty Research Institute, Jewish Women's Archive, Bergen Public Library, UW Digital Collections, The U.S. National Archives, LSE Library, Galt Museum & Archives, LIGC ~ NLW, DC Public Library, nha.library, State Library and Archives of Florida, National Galleries of Scotland, National Library NZ, Australian War Memorial, Musée McCord Museum, State Library of New South Wales, National Media Museum, George Eastman House, Powerhouse Museum Collection

ⁱⁱ www.si.edu/termsfuse/

ⁱⁱⁱ American Art Museum, Anacostia Community Museum, Archives of American Art, Archives of American Gardens, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, National Museum of the American Indian, National Museum of Natural History, Division of Fishes, National Portrait Gallery, National Postal Museum, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Smithsonian Institution Libraries